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ABSTRACT

Supervisors of teaching assistants in small English programs should have no other supervisory obligations, should be given released time, and should meet four qualifications: above average as a teacher of lower-division students, experienced in pedagogical learning theory, excellent in human relations, and experienced in trainee supervision. In addition, realizing their primary function is to help trainees to become accomplished teachers of composition, supervisors need to conduct orientation workshops and weekly seminars; to visit classes frequently, with follow-up conferences; to open their basic writing classes to visiting teaching assistants; to provide a communally used syllabus; and to evaluate assistants' performances. (A bibliography accompanies this paper.) (JM)

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THE SUPERVISOR OF IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN SMALL PROGRAMS: A BASIC JOB DESCRIPTION

Because there are some significant differences between what can feasibly be done in large programs for the in-service training of graduate teaching assistants and in small ones, there are, it seems to me, potentially important differences in what can and should be aimed for in a supervisor in small programs. For instance, in large programs a decision is necessary about whether there will be a single supervisor over many T.A.'s or several supervisors with fewer T.A.'s each. Whichever way the decision runs, there are problems, none of which are likely in small programs. Since in the small program the supervisor will oversee something like 15 or 20 T.A.'s, he automatically has time for what he does and will have time to do more than a single supervisor who has 30, 40, or, God help him, 60 T.A.'s as his charge. Where several supervisors in large programs split up the T.A. load, the achievement of what can be hoped for in small programs is not probable simply on the basis (among others) of the unlikeliness of finding several supervisors with the sterling qualifications and attributes I will elaborate on as being desirable in the supervisor in small programs.

First, however, let me generalize briefly about this supervisor and his situation. Like the trinity, some leaves, most concertos, and all of Gaul, he is divided into three parts. He is a manager, teacher, and friend--an almost incongruous trio of jobs, in fact, all of which he must be able to fit superbly and blend successfully into one. Because this is difficulty enough, he will have no other major supervisory obligations (such as directing the composition program) and will be given released time at the rate of one credit hour off the normal teaching load per five teaching assistants.

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supervised. To treat the job as less important than that is to minimize its potential at the least and, at the worst, to undermine its necessity.

That is generalization enough, though. Let's look at the job description in proper order, in the process uncovering what is so important about the job and so time consuming that it should require released time.

Qualifications

The specific qualifications of the supervisor in small programs will, of course, vary from program to program. They will be contingent upon such factors as the nature and objectives of the composition program, whether or not graduates of the T.A. training program usually go on to college teaching, what is offered elsewhere in the university in the way of training possibilities for college-level or even high school teachers, what courses are offered within the English Department that might make unnecessary some kinds of qualifications, and any number of other factors. Despite these possibilities for variation from program to program, though, there are four qualifications for the job of supervisor that I regard as essential (although not equal) if the English Department in which the small program is located is to gain as many positive results from that program as only small programs are likely to yield.

The first of the qualifications is that the supervisor be especially well qualified, through experience and/or training, as a teacher of basic composition courses and be recognized as one who is well above the average as a teacher of lower division students generally. Since we have been told in recent months that "Johnny" can't write and that entering freshmen aren't well prepared as writers, we ought not to assume that the supervisor will be the only one in the department offering the teaching assistants training in rhetorical and linguistic theory--that is, unless he is coincidentally one of those in the department who teaches courses in them normally. What I am saying is that we should not choose the supervisor because he is a professionally trained rhetorician or linguist or both. We should choose him because he is

especially well qualified as a teacher of basic composition courses and because he is a fine teacher of lower division courses generally. If he happens to be a rhetorician or linguist as well, excellent, but the clearly more important point is that the supervisor will be training teachers of composition directly in the teaching of composition, not necessarily in composition theory. I think we severely restrict the potential of the in-service program if we start putting an overload on the circuit labeled "supervisor," one of the surest ways of doing that being to set up a list of qualifications carelessly so that what is expected first is not really necessary at all. What a small program can best offer T.A.'s is sound, close supervision and well organized experiences in the teaching of composition. Why insist on qualifications for the supervisory job that put other things first, things that could as easily be handled by other department members in other specialized courses?

The second qualification is that the supervisor be sufficiently qualified--through demonstrated interest, experience, and/or training--in pedagogical and learning theory. Not only should the circuit labeled "supervisor" not be overloaded, it should be deliberately underloaded to assure the best results. By making sure that all the current flowing through the circuit is of the same sort, we do in part assure those best results. It therefore stands to reason that if the supervisor is to train teaching assistants to be teachers of composition, he is in effect a methods teacher, methods of teaching composition his specific concern and methods of teaching English his general one. Some would argue that emphasis on methodological matters is really not necessary since interest in--better yet, love of--subject matter is the only source of inspired teaching. I agree that ultimately it is but disagree that we should therefore deny the teaching assistant good models in lower division settings, exhilarating discussions and reading assignments on "methods" of teaching composition, and, most important of all, well organized in-service training experiences in varied kinds of and approaches to the teaching of composition. With the competition for

teaching jobs at all levels as keen as it is, the teaching assistant who can walk into the world confident of his or her teaching ability is at an advantage. Small programs, as will be shown later in this paper, are in an ideal position to offer more personal attention to this important detail of the graduate English major's professional training.

To fit this "methods" role, the supervisor will have had courses in education or will be able to demonstrate his knowledge in lieu of the coursework. He will be a close student of the important publications in teaching-related areas as well as of those devoted specifically to the teaching of composition. Thus, he will know well the contents of books like Kenneth Eble's Professors as Teachers and Career Development of the Effective College Teacher as well as Ohmann's and Coley's Ideas for English 101 and Hans Guth's English for a New Generation. And he will of course be a reader of journals like New Directions in Teaching and Media and Methods as well as the standard run of helpful publications in English, such as College Composition and Communication, College English, Freshman English News, and CEA Critic and Forum.

The third qualification is that the supervisor will be excellent in human relations, something all successful teachers are but which the supervisor, due to the nature of his roles and duties, must be. Because the supervisor must effectively juggle that trio of jobs--manager, teacher, and friend--a great burden is placed upon his ability to be trusted and be accepted by his teaching assistants. They cannot be suspicious of his motives even though many of his duties as supervisor (as will be seen) will border on the suspicious. It should be obvious, therefore, that the supervisor will have to be personable and be capable of winning his teaching assistants' confidence--hence the human relations qualification--despite the fact that he will often have to manage, will sometimes teach by fiat rather than Socratically, and will at times seem more the devil's advocate than teaching assistant's friend.

The fourth qualification ties closely to the third, indeed appears to be part of it. It is that the supervisor will be well qualified--if not in experience, certainly through deliberate preparation--in trainee supervision. If our collective experience as members of academia can be relied upon, we will all agree that there must be a better way of filling supervisory positions, such as that of department head, than by the unselective evolutionary processes that are so often the case. We insist on solid credentials from those who will teach our courses and then allow to ascend to the position of department leader someone who has neither led (except possibly as Den Mother of a Cub Scout troop) nor studied management (except as critic of those who do). The supervisor of in-service training must know how to supervise and will be familiar with the varied techniques and requisites of his supervisory position. He will know how effective supervisors of student teachers in elementary and secondary education operate, for instance, and will not himself be a learner of the lowest order in his supervisor's job. He will know of relevant publications of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and will have read such excellent works as Personalized Supervision: Sources and Insights by Berman and Usery.

What I fear here most, I guess, is the unnecessary repetition of my own first year as supervisor, an experience best described in the way the inexperienced teaching of teaching assistants is so often rationalized: what they lack in experience and ability, they make up for in enthusiasm. I know well enough that enthusiasm is not alone adequate for teaching assistants or supervisors--ever. While it is possible to get by on it, it never fails to look pale in comparison with the real thing. With something as important to an English Department as its in-service training program can be, there's no sense making do without this qualification any more than it is to make do without the others.

Basic Objective / Primary Function

Earlier, I mentioned that the graduate teaching assistant who can walk into

the world confident of his or her teaching ability is at an advantage in today's highly competitive job market. Needless to say, it is the basic objective of the in-service training program to produce this result; hence it may be said of the supervisor that his major objective is to direct all of his energies and knowledge as supervisor to the realization of that end.

Too often, though, that is no more than the "lip-service" objective of the program and supervisor. Seldom is it actually practiced or realized, the complicating factors being the supervisor himself and/or the way the program is not actually designed as much to inspire the development of teaching ability in teaching assistants as it is to see that all goes "well" in the composition program. Such aims, despite their prevalence, are not mutually complementary. They are, however, convenient, so we see them here and there in action, the supervisor a poseur--better yet, simultaneously the director of composition.

Frankly, I see no way that an ordinary mortal is going to be able to be as effective as he could be as supervisor while not teaching regularly--not just a single class, mind you, but at least two a quarter or semester in addition to the weekly meeting he will have with the teaching assistants. Making the supervisor of in-service training the director of composition, or vice versa, is a sure way to keep the supervisor from being actively involved in teaching and thinking about teaching. Both are the stuff of the supervisor's trade, so to speak, so there's no sense bogging him down with what is not the stuff of that trade.

Major Duties and Responsibilities

What, then, makes the supervisor so busy? In part, that has been explained. Carrying out the objective of helping the teaching assistants become as accomplished as teachers of composition as they possibly can in the time they're under the supervisor is time consuming. If the in-service program is really to function as beneficially for the teaching assistants as it can, the duties and responsibilities of the supervisor will be numerous.

To begin with, the supervisor will conduct a weekly seminar in which the teaching of composition is focused on. It will be something like a one-credit-hour, pass-fail course required of all first-year assistants. Such matters as the ways of teaching writing, of "grading" essays (with theme exchanges an occasional exercise), of conducting conferences with students, of integrating instructional media, of using texts and making assignments, and so on will be frequent concerns of this seminar as will problems and successes in classes conducted by the T.A.'s during the week preceding the seminar and approaches to meetings of those classes in the week ahead.

Prior to the start of each quarter or semester, the supervisor will conduct orientation "workshops" with those T.A.'s who have not yet taught the particular writing course they will teach in forthcoming weeks. Therefore, much of what occurs in the weekly seminars will be the investigation of application as opposed to the discussion of theory in any abstract sense. The pre-session workshops will thus serve to expose the teaching assistants to the nature and philosophy of the composition program, what good teachers do generally in teaching composition and in working with students and their writing, and other such concerns. By no means the least important function of both the pre-session workshops and the weekly seminars will be the supervisor's development and nurturing of the teaching assistant's confidence in his guidance and availability.

During <u>all</u> quarters or semesters that teaching assistants are in the in-service program, the supervisor will visit their classes frequently and will require follow-up conferences for discussion of what was observed during each visit. The supervisor will realize that teaching is a public and "performance" activity and that a major responsibility he shoulders is preparing the teaching assistants not only as confident teachers of composition but as visible ones as well. Therefore, as he sees teaching assistants become confident and reasonably competent teachers, he will encourage them also to allow their peers to visit their classes freely for the

purpose of observing other teaching styles and methods, thus enlarging their own knowledge of alternatives, and, equally important, helping one another avoid the path to what I believe is the curse of those in academia who can never submit to true peer evaluation, closed-classroom "invisibility."

It should go without saying that to maximize the effectiveness of their in-service training, the supervisor's own basic writing class will be open to regular visits by the teaching assistants, as will the basic writing classes of other experienced (and willing) teachers in the department. The supervisor will see to it that his own writing class is either the first one held each day or that he is one day ahead of the teaching assistants in his teaching of the course so that those T.A.'s who wish to can come into his class to see what he does with a lesson they themselves must handle with their students.

As should now be apparent, a necessary feature of the in-service training program for the first-year trainees is a communally used syllabus. The supervisor will provide this each quarter or semester and require that the T.A.'s involved adhere to it faithfully, just as he himself will. The syllabus will be heavily annotated and will be especially cogent on the matter of objectives and goals for the quarter or semester and for each class meeting. It will provide for varieties of experience with instructional media and types of teaching and learning.

A final but certainly not unimportant responsibility of the supervisor will be performance evaluations of each T.A. under his supervision--for the assistants' benefit primarily but as well for use when those letters of recommendation must be written. Books like How Colleges Evaluate Professors, The Evaluation of Teaching College English, and The Recognition and Evaluation of Teaching will be well known to the supervisor so that his system of evaluation will be valid and efficient.

Conclusion

Yes, it can be said in conclusion that I do believe deeply that the potential for the small in-service training program is great and that I do believe the

supervisor chosen must indeed be the right person: in qualifications, in ability to structure and carry out, and in willingness to be held accountable. The supervisor for <u>that</u> job will have no trouble making good use of his released time and will have no doubt that a good deal more of it should be given him!

A SELECTED LIST OF READINGS FOR SUPERVISORS OF IN-SERVICE TRAINING

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and
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College Composition and Communication
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Freshman English Shoptalk (published at Kansas State University)
Writing as a Liberating Activity (published at Findlay College)
CEA Forum
CEA Critic (published by the College English Association)
ADE Bulletin (published by the Associated Departments of English)
Media and Methods
English Journal (intended primarily for secondary schools, but useful)
New Directions in Teaching (published at Bowling Green State University)
Exercise Exchange (published at University of Vermont)

The supervisor should also look into publications of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Washington, D.C.